

RADIO TRANSMUNDANE

Part One

If you're already living
in a futuristic dystopian spy novel
why not be a covert operative?

I first met Al about nine months ago at the public library across the street. He sat facing me from behind one of the group tables at the back.

Obviously, Al isn't his real name. His "designation" (his word, not mine), is A-0 121. After quickly swearing me to secrecy he told me his real name, which sounded equally as preposterous, so I took it upon myself to just call him Al. Easier to say, no chance I'd get him confused with that *other* Al, plus it's a decent steak sauce.

Anyway, it all started as he opened up his laptop. I couldn't help but notice the decal that he'd stuck on the lid over the manufacturer's logo; it was this weird, occulty-looking thing, kind of sinister and menacing.

Over the next hour or so I kept glancing at it, trying to figure out what it was. Apparently I was too focused on it and hadn't noticed Al observing me.

When our eyes finally met he looked like he'd already cooked a three course meal, eaten it, taken a steam, napped, freshened up, and was now in every way ready for our encounter.

I, on the other hand, must've looked like a hungry deer in headlights. I said something like, "Umm ... that's an unusual design. Do you mind if I ask what it is?"

Without skipping an easy-going beat he obligingly rolled into a detailed explanation.

A lot of what he would go on to tell me was, let's say, *highly improbable*. If I'm being generous, it was *imaginative*. On the bath salts scale it would be more *eccentric* as opposed to something like a prolonged, violent stare from a very

large and disheveled man. But he was eager to share and I was looking for easy content, so we were both already winners.

After absorbing the story for a little while I started to think: damn, I really should start recording some of this, then I could just write around it at my leisure. I asked him how he felt about being recorded, he said "good", and the rest is history.

We wouldn't always meet in the library. Sometimes we'd just bump into each other out on the sidewalk, or we'd brush past each other at the grocery store, or run into each other at the coffee shop. And it wasn't every day. Sometimes there would be stretches during which I wouldn't see him for weeks at a time. And sometimes our run-ins were short and shallow; not every conversation is a deep one.

In the end it all gave me lots of material to work with.

Before I get into it, though, I need to make sure that you understand that some of the information may have been altered or redacted for privacy and security.

During that first conversation I obviously had to ask what A-O 121 stood for.

"The A-O," he said, "stands for Agent-Operative. The serial number is one-two-one. I work for an underground agency in a covert capacity."

I believe that my response went something like, "O ... kaaaayyyy."

That still seems like a pretty reasonable way to reply, given the context of both him and our environment: a germy, crowded, rundown, inner-city public library.

He seemed to sense my reluctance.

"Walking around like James Bond wouldn't be very covert. Besides, that shit's expensive," he explained.

I had to admit it was sound logic. You're less likely to get noticed looking like some schlep hunched over in a corner of a downtown public library than some heat-packing dapper dandy strolling around on the sidewalk outside. Way less glamorous, way less expensive.

"Also," he continued, "the word 'spy' isn't really correct for what Agent-Operatives do. That word connotes large organizations and powerful individuals. That's not what we're about. But a lot of what we do has the same M.O. so the comparison's to be expected."

"So who do you work for then?" I asked, naturally.

"I work *with* the organization. *With* it."

"Okay, so who do you work *with*?"

"Transmundane. The org."

I sat there, blinking, waiting for a bit more information.

None came.

"If you've never heard of it, it must be pretty covert, right?" he continued, as if once again sensing the question building in my mind.

This kinda freaked me out and now I was thinking: does he know why I'm not answering him?

I felt like I was in that volcano insurance salesman bit: salesman tries to sell volcano insurance to some guy. Guy says, "What volcanoes do we need to be insured against around here?!"

"Sir, the modern science regarding *known* volcanoes isn't perfect but it gives most people a reasonable chance to flee in case of disaster. Unfortunately, close to nothing is known about hidden and unknown volcanoes and it's exactly because of these characteristics that they are the biggest danger of all! Luckily, you can now insure your house against them," replies the salesman.

That's pretty airtight right there, amirite?

So how best to answer Al's question tactfully ...

At length I mustered an, "I suppose," waited a tactful amount of time, then continued slowly with, "but me not having heard of something doesn't prove anything about its existence."

"You've got a point," he said with a shit-eating grin that slowly ate the rest of his face. "You're absolutely right. If Transmundane really is that covert

and underground then there isn't much I can do to prove to you it exists. Best I can do is show you some of the techniques, the equipment, the philosophy."

"Not sure if that'll prove anything either," I replied solemnly.

"True true," he nodded, "but it's a moot point until you've finished the test anyway."

"What test?"

Was he testing me somehow? That seemed *incredibly* presumptuous.

"See," he said, "you're being tested all the time. Free will and all that."

This was starting to feel religious and I hadn't yet seen hide nor hair of any "techniques", "equipment", or "philosophy" to suggest otherwise.

Cautiously, I asked, "You mean, like, being judged by the universe? Karma? God's wrath? That sort of thing?"

"Sure," he replied cheerfully, "if that's what you like to call it. You can even talk about it scientifically, as each action having it's own, opposite reaction."

"Okay, so what do you call it?"

"Existence. Reality. Causality. Quantum randomness. I don't know ... what do you call it?"

"Umm, the same I guess. I just thought you might have some special, more, you know, *transmundane* sort of word for it."

"Yeah, well, the word covers it all. Besides, I didn't come up with it."

"I see. And who did?"

"The founders did," he replied matter-of-factly. "The organization's had many names over the years and the with each name came its own set of founders. For every new aeon a new paradigm."

"Underneath it all," he continued, "there's a shared, secret ideology. Once you've got a certain security clearance you can instantly recognize which groups precede Transmundane and who its current allies are. Being able to accurately test situations is a crucial skill for any agent or operative.

"By the way," he concluded with a thumbs-up, "you're passing the test so far".

"Okay," I chuckled, unsure of what else to say, and went back to Reddit.

Eventually I got some interesting info out of Al beyond the stories of "the founders", interesting though the stories are.

The first item may well have been plucked from something like Phantom 2040 but it seems plausible.

He described the Transmundane "invisibility hood", basically just your average hoodie covered in wide-angle, ultra-bright, infrared LEDs. The idea is that when it's on it blinds most modern electronic devices such as surveillance cameras, digital phones, mobile phones, and so on.

It works on the same principle as when you shine the end of a remote control into your phone's camera. People can see your face just fine, electronics only see a big white blur. Not sure where to get one but it would be a nice superpower to have.

Then he told me how to manufacture a "truth serum". Turns out it's a pretty dangerous substance. Yes, it can be used to elicit information but it can just as easily kill someone. Not something I'd want to fuck around with. So you can imagine that I was pretty weirded out when he took me down to a neighbour's garden and simply plucked the product from there.

"And, umm, this grows everywhere?" I remember asking nervously.

"Yeah, pretty much," he answered with a smile, "and there are plenty of other plants around the city with their own uses."

He also taught me a technique to "slow down time", but here an argument ensued.

I said something to the effect of, "This isn't really slowing down of time, it's more of a speeding up of how fast you can do stuff."

"What's the difference?" he shrugged nonchalantly.

"It's a big difference," I remember getting defensive. "When you slow down time everything around you slows down, like in the Matrix. When you work faster you're just working faster. It's two different things."

"Depends on your point of view," he answered, leaning in. "For example, how would you look to people around you if you slowed down time. It'd be like you were moving really fast, right?"

"Okay, yeah."

"So moving really fast could actually be a sign that someone has slowed time, yes?"

"Possibly, I suppose."

"And if that person was actually thinking and moving faster, would it not be fair to say that from your point of view they would appear to have actually slowed down time?"

"From my point of view, yeah, I guess I might see it that way."

"And there you go. So what if you and I know the terrible truth about how it really works? If most people believe that we can actually slow down time, that we can see the world in some rotating bullet slow mo, let 'em think it!"

"I'd agree to that, partially, only because someone might want to take it on as a challenge."

"Don't forget we can still effectively slow down time, at least from their perspective. Plus there's all of our other training. But if someone feels the need to challenge you for who and what you are, there's nothing to do but stand up and face 'em.

"In the meantime, " he laughed out loud, "you can also enjoy yourself!"

The thing about Al is that we clicked. Our unapologetically apolitical ideologies, our shared love of the paradoxical, our visions of the future; it all synced.

I just had a big problem with his backstory. The Transmundane founders, where he came from, what he'd been doing in the city; the narratives were pretty far out there.

"It's okay to be cautious you know?" I remember him interjecting into some conversation with a wagging finger. "As a covert agent you have to remain skeptical and aware. It might even save your life some time."

"You mean like being aware of my environment so that I don't walk into a lamp post?" I responded.

"Yes, well, looking up from the phone seems to be a form of super human ability these days but no, I'm talking about extending the senses beyond their usual limits, maybe even discovering new ones."

"Like what?" I asked, intrigued by these "new ones".

"Like the ability to see around corners."

"Okay, I'll bite," I said after a few moments of silence. "How does *that* work?"

He went on to explain a technique that ended up sounding both mundane and not particularly scientific. But it seemed possible that if a person could train their vision in the way that he described, the resulting ability could be seen being able to see around corners. Hard to say if it would work as advertised but it sounded plausible.

"As with any technique, some agents will excel at it and some will fail miserably," he concluded.

"So are there training manuals for all this stuff?" I asked, half genuinely interested and half calling his bluff.

He reached into his bag and produced some very obviously self-published books. The unbelievably dogged ears, the stained and thumbbed pages, the peeling covers, the samizdat feel - just what you'd hope for.

"You hold on to those but I'll need them back at some point, okay?" he said, pushing the stack my way.

The books had seen a lot of action and demanded a lot of post-handling hand washing that I wasn't willing to commit to. After a few rounds of "but I couldn't" vs. "but I absolutely insist", I reluctantly accepted them.

As with most things handed to me in the library, I shoved the books somewhere into my bag and forgot about them the moment I walked through the sliding glass doors.

I found them again a couple of weeks later when they accidentally slipped out of the bag. I was already on my way to the shitter and it seemed like the appropriate time to break them in.

They ended up being a good read.

According to the literature, Transmundane is made up of agents or operatives-in-training, and operatives. At least that seemed to be the gist of the first manual I picked up.

It also had a stern warning about accepting anything it said as authoritative or even correct due to the limitations of the medium it was produced on. I remember finding the stark honesty refreshing.

I also remember raising an eyebrow when reading that Transmundane is, "a for-profit secret society of espionage-oriented spiritualists and enthusiasts." They're open to "alternative thinkers" and those into "spooky, sci-fi, undercover shit!" (written in a psychedelic font)

Oh, and their primary focus used to be software development. No mention of any mass suicide comets. Yet.

I know what you're thinking ... can I give them all my money and where do I sign up?!

The rest of the "Why Is Transmundane?" section of "How To Be A Secret Agent - The Clandestine History Of Transmundane", was surprisingly lucid. It lacked UFOs and time travelling big foots, but it did keep mentioning an organization called Central Control. It was obviously the bad guy. I guess it was assumed that the reader knew all about Central since it was never hinted at who they actually are, how they operate, or where one can find them.

Occasionally, "The Authority" would pop up in the writing. From the context I took it to mean that it / he / she / they are the head(s) of Central. Like I said, we're already supposed to know all this.

After only a few pages the manual had completely run out of history and turned instead to focus on "living as an effective undercover agent in a modern surveillance society."

The "invisibility hood" was mentioned.

There was a section on painting your face to throw off AI facial recognition.

Using masks as a "preventative health measure" was used to illustrate "culturally and circumstantially appropriate ways to creatively anonymize your face." So was "living in a city", a section that also included the suggestion, "if you're already living in a futuristic dystopian spy novel why not be a covert operative?"

There were a couple of detailed sections discussing the use of Neuro Linguistic Programming and "projecting altered states of consciousness (for the advanced agent-operative)", in order to make oneself "invisible" to people you interact with.

It went on to cover some counter-surveillance, pretty basic stuff about leaving any radio device at home, taking random routes, dressing average and blending in, being aware of your surroundings at all times, etc.

Then the manual abruptly signed off with an address for cryptocurrency donations and a promise to return with "Transmundane Weapons Training!"

Now we were getting somewhere.

The next manual opens with "How To Indoctrinate Your Friends".

It talks about forming cells or "zentens" of no more than ten trusted, fellow operatives. Why ten? Simply because there should be "no more to count on than the number of fingers on which to count." Nothing is mentioned should you happen to have nine fingers or less.

Now we move on to "How Do We Arm Ourselves?"

The first part of the chapter starts out flatly with, "Your #1 Weapon - Your Smile!"

It opens with:

"In a fight between an assailant using a gun and an assailant using a smile, the assailant using the smile will definitely lose."

True.

"Similarly, a knife-wielding assailant will almost certainly win against a smile-wielding one. A smile in any sufficiently aggressive physical encounter is a terrible weapon to have."

True. True.

"But how often does the typical agent-operative deal with such encounters in a day? If they've maintained cover, close to zero. It's always good to rehearse a plan B, for when a situation goes sideways, but it should be rarely invoked. Instead, interpersonal skills are much more likely to be used and so should be the primary focus of training."

Sounds reasonable.

"Think of the smile as a metaphor for personality. Instead of taking up arms, disarm *them*. And remember to stay covert."

I think that the author could've saved some paper by just writing "you catch more flies with honey", but there it is.

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The second part of the chapter begins with, "Your #2 Weapon - Your Training!"

After making it clear that one manual, let alone a part of a chapter, is insufficient to cover the topic, this section does a masterful job of lacking any specifics. It's mostly a philosophical treatise consisting of illustrations and warnings about "unintended consequences".

The biggest takeaway: "stay covert."

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The third and final part of the chapter is titled, "Your #3 Weapon - Your Weapon!"

This is where the "truth serum" is described. It is terrifyingly simple to produce, especially if you don't care how lethal the dose may be.

Another weapon detailed is the "broad-spectrum frequency jammer". It's said to work against TV, radio, cell, WiFi, Bluetooth ... anything that broadcasts or receives. Simple device that uses junked motors, scary easy to assemble.

There are a few Anarchist Cookbook recipes in there along with instructions on building 3D printed guns without arousing suspicion.

As far as covert options go, the manual admits, these are all the least desirable ones.

"They may also do irreparable harm to the user," it concludes.

The rest of the manual talks about other options like taking up martial arts or traditional weapons training but cautions against spending too much time on them since "it's unlikely that the operative will get to employ them." Also, they're not very covert.

Having just ploughed through two of the Transmundane manuals I had a few questions for Al so the next time we met I got straight to it.

"Violence is mentioned in one of the manuals. Is that something that Transmundane advocates?"

"Of course not," replied Al, visibly astonished. "But it is an unavoidable fact of life. It just so happens to be a fairly minor one most of the time. You *did* read the rest of the manual, didn't you?"

"Yes. I was just surprised to learn that a 'spiritualist' group would even consider using violence," I retorted with mild snark.

"Sometimes you have to defend yourself and besides we never claimed to be pacifists!" surrendered Al with upraised arms. "Too bad that that's all you took from the books though."

I gestured for him to put his arms down.

"Actually," I corrected, "I took quite a bit away from them so far. These first two, for instance," I said, handing over the books, "were different from the others.

"The other manuals, the ones that start with 'Transmundane Training Manual', all seem to be put together by different people, a lot of them hand-written. Some are only a couple of pages long."

"Yes," he replied enthusiastically. "they're put together by operatives who have achieved a certain level of confidence in their skills. These manuals are intended as guides for new agents and recruits."

"Have you written one?" I prodded.

"I added to a number of them. It only makes sense to start one if you have skills that no one else has. Otherwise you're just muddying the waters."

"I didn't see a bibliography, no footnotes, no attributions of any kind, " I pointed out.

"That wouldn't be very covert, would it?" he answered with a smile that was ripped straight off the Cheshire Cat.

I entirely forgot what I was going to ask next. I only remember pondering how fantastically convenient it is to pull out a "covert" or a "secret" or an "eyes only" to shut down a conversation:

"Hey, Frank, how're you doin' today?"

"Classified, Clarence. If I told you I'd have to kill you."

When I got home I spread the training manuals out on the table. I excluded some of the thicker ones - they needed to be brief and punchy for when I had a few spare minutes.

Soon, the throne beckoned and the time came to pull the first booklet. It was titled "Transmundane Training Manual - Basics Of Temporal Dilation".

The introduction encourages the agent to call it "slowing down time" or something similarly impressive, should anyone ask, because "anyone who doesn't already know doesn't need to know".

Seems that AI was just following protocol.

The manual then goes on to stress the need for ways to measure progress, or "metrics". This is done by recording a baseline, a measurement of how long something regularly takes if you hurry, then doing that same thing but while constantly being aware of the passage of time; basically, watching the clock.

Now you should note the difference between the first time and the second time, and divide this by the baseline to produce a percentage of time saved.

Repeat this three (or four) times, then get an average by adding up all the percentages and dividing by three (or four).

If the result is negative then this skill may not be for you; try something else. If it's 0.2 (20%) or more then "your pot might never boil" - definitely consider more training. If you're in between, do a few more tests or try something else.

The training includes more clock-watching with a stress on "extended" progress tracking (including how you slept / how you feel / what the

weather's like / etc.), using binaural beats - or "NRT", Transmundane's *upgraded* version - to help shift consciousness, and incorporating slow movements into daily exercises, not unlike Tai Chi, to learn how to better sense and control the body while in motion.

At high speeds, says the manual, you can only fly by instinct, not analytical thought. Short-circuited sensory response is all you can depend on so that's what you train. Repetition and (un)focus are how you train it.

And, claims the book, when your body is able to work on automatic your analytical mind becomes free to plot strategy. The instructions conclude by reminding the reader to "never underestimate the power of shortcuts."

An addendum appears after that, written manually by an unnamed operative claiming to regularly score 0.35 using "chemical enhancements". These are not detailed but while noting their efficacy, the writer closes with the warning that "the effects of addiction are a serious concern here."

I decided to skip the substances and just try out the basic version to see if I could boost my reaction speed.

The immediate results were effective enough for me to include some of the techniques into my daily life. Granted, my efforts are at best half-assed but even so I'm seeing some surprising results.

For instance, I've noticed that I rarely allow anything to drop. Whether it slips from my hand, falls from a shelf, or tumbles from somewhere above, my hand will be in place to catch it. The action is effortless and immediate, like an instantaneous reflex that's hard-wired to intent.

Sometimes I do it when looking in another direction. Sometimes I even do it behind my back. While it's happening it feels completely natural but then when I play it back in my mind I'm like, "holy shit, did I just do that?"

It's not perfect, mind you. I still sometimes drop stuff but it's rare. I'm even noticing improvements in other reflexes too, not just in saving keys and coffee mugs from the floor.

See, I'm no spring chicken and I've come not to expect such things to improve, so seeing the mounting evidence makes the technique hard to dismiss.

It also makes the whole thing kind of disturbing.

I thought this was all just some crackpot fun but now here's something that actually works. I mean, if this stuff is real then what else is?

"The thing about Transmundane training," said Al after listening to my latest review, "is that it's not for everyone. Some agents click with it and some don't. Some have skills that are undocumented and they suck at everything else. Makes 'em feel like they're not cut out for the org. That can be a real bummer."

"What sort of a person *is* cut out for the org?" I asked, genuinely curious.

"The kind of person interested in cloak and dagger stuff, dabbling in cryptography and secret exchanges, going on clandestine intelligence gathering, engaging in covert operations, that sort of thing. They're the kind of person whose history, when viewed later in life, could read like the beginning of a good espionage yarn."

"Okay, so what if I think spies are cool but all I've ever done is clean toilets?" I asked.

"That might just be your cover," replied Al.

"How do you mean?"

"It'd be hard to believe that all you've done is clean toilets, 24-7. There are plenty of other activities in between to consider. A skill is no less useful just because it's labelled a hobby, it might even be more so. Besides, cleaning crappers has its own set of specialty skills and knowledge attached to it."

"Yeah but how is that a 'cover'?"

"Oh, you haven't gotten to the parts about sleeper agents?"

"No, seems I haven't."

"Sleeper agents are, well, asleep. In reality," said Al with a slow, deep, meaningful nod," they're awake but they're unconsciously nudged in the direction of certain interests and activities throughout their life. They're asleep to their own underlying nature, if that makes sense. This way they can work toward becoming fully-trained operatives while maintaining deep cover. Sometimes they might get the feeling that they're supposed to be living another life but most of the time they're not conscious of being agents."

"How is that possible?" I asked, instantly conjuring up an astonishingly detailed Manchurian Candidate scenario.

"Transmundane agents are just born that way. Maybe it's genetic, we're not sure. It's like, how do cats know how to live like cats?"

It took me a while to mull that one over. Not the cats part but how we're all born with certain propensities and therefore subconsciously gravitate towards certain experiences. If we call these experiences "training" then the idea of being born a Transmundane agent fits in. But then again, wouldn't this be true of everyone?

"Sure," replied Al to the question I'd just thought out loud. "But we have to be careful not to mistake the cover for the agent. A good cover can require training too, sometimes lots of it."

"So how can you tell the difference?" I inquired.

He shrugged.

"I'm not sure that there's a single answer for that. Every agent has to decide for themselves which training experiences are for the agency and which are a cover."

"It probably doesn't matter much, though," he continued, pouting indifferently. "When you need to use a skill who cares what it was originally intended for?"

That pretty much shut down that line of questions so I changed directions.

"Okay, so what if an agent *doesn't* wake up, or maybe they deny who they are and just continue on with their old life?"

"That can result in mental health problems, emotional issues, destructive behaviours, all sorts of unhealthy stuff. In the best-case scenario the sleeper will carry around a feeling like they're missing something important, like they've spent their life preparing, just not sure what for."

"And what if the sleeper never wakes up? Does that ever happen?"

"It's a lot like having to wake up from regular sleep; when the alarm clock goes off the sleeper has to make the choice to rise and get out of bed. If they make the conscious decision not to, they remain asleep and that's where problems can start."

"So what are these 'alarms'?" I continued.

"These alarms or triggers often repeat and can be anything from a piece of prose or a poem, to music or sounds, art or symbols, gestures and actions. Even this conversation could be a trigger. Sometimes they're obvious, sometimes they're very subtle."

"Doesn't that mean that triggers can get missed?"

"Yeah," explained Al, "it's a delicate balancing act. Make 'em too overt and they're liable to blow the agent's cover. Make 'em too subtle and they're liable to get missed. The agency depends on the agent's basic training to process

triggers, even peripherally, in order to produce that nagging feeling in the gut that I was talking about.

"It's supposed to inspire flashes of recognition or even a full-blown anamnesis. Even a partially restored identity can give an agent insight into their life history and provide instructions on how to proceed next."

Okay, fine. But I was still missing some crucial pieces of information:

1. Who do Transmundane agents and operatives work for (or "with" as AI had corrected me)?
2. What does Transmundane actually do and how does Central Control fit into it?

AI started by answering the second question first.

"All the regular stuff," he replied, "Espionage, sabotage, subterfuge, infiltration, exfiltration, insurrection, inspiration, misdirection, misinformation, manipulation. You know, shaping world events from the shadows.

"It's our M.O. that's different from traditional agencies. Some of the training, like the time dilation, is mostly physical. But operatives also train in things like remote viewing, psychic assassination, extra-sensory manipulation, tactical thaumaturgy, consciousness projection, and so on."

"What's 'thaumaturgy'?" I asked, starting with the most obvious gap in my knowledge.

"A focused projection of the will. Some people call it magic but they don't mean the stage kind, no sleight of hand or pulling rabbits out of hats. These same people often stick a 'k' on the word to differentiate it from illusionist

tricks but there's a certain stigma attached to the whole scene so we're using different language to try to ditch the baggage."

"You mean like witches and warlocks, that kind of stuff?" I asked, feeling the cold skepticism in my veins.

"No. Not at all. That would be like comparing a modern chemist to a medieval alchemist. Both work toward similar ends but obviously the tools and knowledge of today are much more effective and refined. That kind of thinking right there is exactly why we use different terminology," he replied, pointing an accusing finger at my response.

"Yeah. Except that modern chemistry has hundreds of years of empirical research backing it. You know, observations and *repeatable* experiments; science," I countered.

"Of course!" replied Al, throwing his arms wide in a gesture of agreement. "There's plenty of very credible science behind what we do. Agents *need* to be able to depend on their training so it can't be just fanciful theory or wishful thinking. I'm sure you've read in the manuals that if a skill doesn't work you should try something else?"

I nodded yes.

"It's no different whether it's thaumaturgy or remote viewing or any of the other Transmundane skills. If you're not seeing results with the training then move on. Don't waste your time wishing that something would work when you could be spending it training in something that does."

I *had* found some success in at least one technique so maybe I'd have luck with another. So far the material indicated a reassuring self-awareness that agents' super abilities are often a matter of semantics, so I decided to defer judgment.

"So what about this Central Control?" I asked, gesturing toward the first manual I'd read. "And what exactly is The Authority?"

"This is what they're commonly called. They take on so many identities that we've stopped trying to use any single name. The ones in the manual are really more descriptions than actual names, adjectives as opposed to pronouns.

"So as you can imagine The Authority sits at the top of the hierarchy, in command of Central. There are plenty of theories about who or what The Authority actually is but to date they're only theories.

"In any event, Central's a strict top-down order that uses fear, intimidation, threats, blackmail, violence, and other coercive and underhanded methods to maintain and spread itself. Pretty textbook supervillain stuff.

"But Central has two main weaknesses. One, it's big, bulky, bureaucratic, and slow. Two, it's built on an ideology that's firmly grounded in materialism, in the mundane.

"We're the antithesis. It's why we're called Transmundane. It's the reason we have zentens and focus on the techniques we focus on. It's why we live by the code we live by."

I didn't recall seeing this "code" in the literature. Maybe it was in some unrelated manual; they all had a very loosey-goosey arrangement so it was definitely possible.

"Sorry, what code?" I admitted, glancing at the books.

"Oh, you won't find it in there. It's in here," he said, thumping the middle of his chest with his fist.

Then, leaning forward slowly in his chair he stared me straight in the eye and whispered, "Now regarding who we work with, I think it's time you met the handler."